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The
NEW
WOMAN
of
INDIA



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INDIA is to-day one of the most fascinating countries of the Orient and no subject pertaining to it is more fraught with interest than the development of Indian women. The multiplicity of races differing in customs, religion and character makes a short discussion of the women of India difficult, as it is almost impossible to generalize.

In considering any phase of the life or customs of Indian women, one must bear in mind the fact that India is a land of contrasts: fabulous wealth, extreme poverty; brilliant minds, dense ignorance; power of the Rajas and utter depression of the lowest classes; wonderful beauty of the mountains and arid desolation of the deserts; culture and refinement of the educated minority and illiteracy of the masses.

THE ZENANA WOMAN

Nowhere is the contrast more striking than between the new woman of India and her sister, the zenana woman. To get any adequate conception of the problem of Indian women of the present day, it is necessary to remember that this is a time of transition. Indian womanhood is just lifting its head after years of degradation. Until recently the average Indian woman was content to stay behind the purdah but now many are timidly emerging from the silence, seclusion and superstitions of purdah life into the freedom, liberty and enlightenment of the wider life waiting for them outside.

The majority of Indian women, considering numbers alone, are still living in zenanas in what may be called the old period of Indian womanhood. These women differ but little in their life from the women of old Mogul days. But new conceptions are revolutionizing old customs. Broader visions of the possibilities

of women are overcoming the limitations of those olden times. A few have come out entirely into the sunlight of the new day. A great number linger in the doorway between the old and the new. The change is taking place gradually and in many cases leading women who are extremely modern in most respects are still clinging tenaciously to many old customs.

THE NEW WOMAN

Three examples of well-educated women who are still in zenanas but who are affecting the thought and life of India in a vital way are Hageat Bibi of Kobul, the Maharam of Baroda and the Begum of Bopal. Hageat Bibi, a formidable old woman, is the mother of the present Amie of Afghanistan and played an important part in the late border disputes.

A PRINCESS

The Maharam of Baroda is the wife of the Taikmar of Baroda, one of the most enlightened native princes of India. She is well educated, speaks English perfectly, is a leader in many progressive reforms in the life of the state and is cognizant of all that goes on in the Raja's court, and yet she lives in her zenana and in many respects observes the rules which have been obligatory upon Hindu wives from time immemorial.

A RULER

The Begum of Bopal is the only woman ruler of India. She is a Mohammedan and observes strict purdah, wearing her burka even when visiting the English Court. She is educated and rules her court and native state very wisely, but does not speak English, and receives foreign visitors through the aid of an interpreter. When holding audience with foreign men the Begum sits behind a purdah while the conversation is going on. She is very interested in America and pleased to give Americans interviews. When speaking with her Highness, some think of her as an interesting friend rather than as a great ruler, because of her kindly expression and simple manner. The keenness of her eyes betokens her high intelligence. She is an ardent supporter of all measures to uplift and

educate Indian women. Under her direct supervision she has a school for high caste children and a Purdah Club for the women of Bopal.

COLLEGE WOMEN

The college woman is a comparatively recent phenomenon in India but there are now nine hundred women graduates of Indian colleges. These women must be the leaders to open the door of progress for Indian women. Many of them are teachers, some are doctors and others are following various public careers or are married to educated men and are influencing other women through the home.

PROGRESSIVE LEADERS

The real vanguard of the Indian woman of the future is made up of a small group of brilliant, refined, cultured women from the upper classes who have had exceptional advantages of education and foreign travel and who occupy prominent positions in India in social, educational, political and religious circles.

A REFORMER

The first to be mentioned would be Pundita Ramabai, who for many years has devoted her life to work for Indian women. She was the first Brahmin widow to break the thrall laid upon Hindu widows. She acquired a splendid education in England and America and has for many years conducted schools for Hindu widows in Kedgaon. In connection with the schools she has a publishing establishment and has completed various translations of the Bible and many other books. Her home for widows and her schools represent the first step of Indian women to break the shackles of the past and free themselves from the superstitions which have bound them.

A POETESS

Mrs. Sorojini Naidu is a poetess of international reputation, two of her books of poems, "The Golden Threshold" and "The Broken Wing," being well known to American readers. Songs from these two books have been set to music by English and

American composers. Mrs. Naidu is a charming little person, very fascinating in her jewels and her Indian draperies of silk. On her forehead she wears the tiny red mark which betokens she is a married Hindu woman. Her husband is a prominent Hindu physician of Hyderabad Deccan, and held a commission in the war. Mrs. Naidu was educated in England and Europe and is interested in many questions of world-wide interest. She is a popular lecturer being known as the golden-tongued orator of India, and she is closely identified with politics and various movements pertaining to the government of India and the life of the people. This versatile woman is frequently appointed on commissions to represent the Indian woman's attitude toward questions which must be discussed with the Government. She was recently a member of the committee sent to England to speak for Home Rule for India.

A MUSICIAN

Begum Fyzee Rahamin is an extremely interesting woman who spent last season in New York. She was educated in Girton College (Cambridge), and was the first Mohammedan girl to win an English scholarship for her intellectual achievements. She has spent many years in London and Paris and is particularly interested in the interpretation of Indian art and music. She is a musician of rare ability and has lectured on Indian music and demonstrated the same to select Paris and New York audiences. While in New York the Begum had records made of her singing, the first records of the kind to be made. With the Begum, while she was in America, were her husband, a celebrated Indian artist and two sisters, one of whom, Her Highness, the Begum Sabiba of Janjira, is a most charming Indian woman, of great grace and refinement. The Begum Sabiba also plays with skill upon various difficult Indian musical instruments.

A PHYSICIAN

Dr. Karmarkar, of Bombay, is another interesting woman of India. She is an Indian Christian and has devoted many years to improving conditions of life for Indian women. She received her M. D. degree from the Women's Medical College of Philadelphia, and her son graduated from Princeton. She is a highly valued member of the Indian National Committee of the Young Womens Christian Association.

A LAWYER

Miss Cornelia Sorabji has the distinction of being the first woman lawyer of India. She is having a most interesting career in Calcutta where she handles business matters in the courts for many zenana women who would otherwise be obliged to conduct their affairs through the medium of a barrister with whom the necessary interview would have to be held from behind a purdah. A zenana woman is not prohibited from talking with men but she must not be seen by one. Miss Sorabji is a charming cultured woman of keen intelligence, whose public career has left no touch of unbecoming boldness which many feared would be the result of public life upon Indian women, as is so often supposed to be the case with women when they first enter public life.

AN EDUCATIONALIST

Miss Cornelia Sorabji is a member of a remarkable family which has exerted a marked influence on the development of education for women in India. They stand out as one of the few prominent Parsee families which has adopted Christianity. The father and mother were broad and far ahead of their time in their attitude toward the question of education for girls. After exceptional advantages of education and travel the various members of the family have become leaders in different lines of activity.

Two sisters have excellent schools for high caste girls and are leaders in educational affairs, one in Dacca (Central Provinces), and the other, Miss Susie Sorabji, in Poona (Bombay Presidency). Another sister, who is a poetess of marked ability, took a medical degree and married an English surgeon, Dr. Pennell, who was famous for his work among the frontier tribes of Afghanistan. After his death Mrs. Pennell continued his hospital work in Baunu. During the war the English Government commandeered this hospital, made it a military base and conferred a military rank upon Mrs. Pennell so that she could remain in charge of the hospital. Later, when the necessity for using this hospital as a military base ceased to exist, Dr. Pennell was appointed by the Government to be one of the five women doctors in charge of a large military hospital in Bombay—The Freeman Thomas Hospital. Incidentally, two of these doctors were American women.

PARSEE LEADERS

There is an interesting group of Parsee women in Bombay. The Parsees are as a class the best educated people in India and the Parsee women have had more freedom to develop as the zenana system has never existed among them and they have never had purdah. Bombay society is made up of prominent members of the English, Mohammedan, Hindu and Parsee communities.

Among the Parsees, Lady Tata, Lady Petit and Lady Jehangir may be mentioned as leading society women who, because of their education, culture, ability, wealth and high social position, are able to give invaluable aid in the development of a larger, freer life for women.

These three women, as well as many others in the same group, have spent much time in European capitals, in governmental circles. They are accomplished women and charming hostesses. Lady Tata is especially interested in all questions pertaining to the education of Indian girls. She was at one time vice-president of the Bombay Girls' High School Athletic Association with which the Young Womens Christian Association has been closely connected. Its growth was one determining factor in procuring an American physical director for the Bombay Association.

WOMEN'S CLUBS

A significant sign of the advance made by Indian women is the rapid development of the Indian Women's National Association. Local clubs of the organization exist in all of the large cities of India. The object of the club is social and educational uplift. It would correspond to the average women's club for an American city. Monthly lectures on various subjects such as literature, science and art are given with occasional open guest meetings for social enjoyment. At these meetings one may see Hindu, Mohammedan, Parsee, English and American ladies hobnobbing together. Women who keep strict purdah are these; many do not speak a word of English, but all mingle in the most natural way.

STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF THE NEW ERA

A few years ago a gathering of women of the different races and castes of India would have been impossible. Questions of importance which would not have caused a ripple of interest among Indian women a decade ago are now eagerly discussed by them. Government reforms, Home Rule, social welfare work, schools, dispensaries, proper housing conditions, hospitals for women and children, ways to spread abroad propaganda regarding proper care of children by mothers, better conditions in factories for women, regulation of child labor and child marriages, and the right of women owning property to vote,—these and many other such subjects are receiving the careful, intelligent interest of thoughtful Indian women who are striving to bridge the great gulf between the old order and the new. Many of these women will make mistakes and many struggles lie ahead as the masses follow these leaders.

The inevitable faults of a transitional period are evident. In an exuberance of new found liberty some have indulged in excesses. Many have chosen the crudest, cheapest features of the foreign patterns they are copying because they have not yet established standards by which to gauge and judge their intrinsic worth. However, through education in the best which foreign countries have to give to India will come the knowledge which will lead Indian women to eliminate the undesirable and to choose the best in the new life unfolding before them.

Indian women are looking toward English and American women for examples upon which to pattern their new life. The part of American womanhood is to give of her best to India that she may gain the highest ideals upon which to base the new life of her women, and that there may come to her a vision of the great things to be accomplished by the united power of women, of whatever race or creed.

Practically without exception all the women mentioned above are interested in the work of the Young Womens Christian Association in India. Several of them are active friends of the Association. They recognize and welcome the active help which the Y. W. C. A. is giving in the development of Indian women.

